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ABSTRACT

This publication is one of a series designed to inform and assist those responsible for foreign language instruction, including teachers, administrators, supervisors, and those engaged in teacher education. The complete series serves as a curriculum guide. The format of the series is such that it can be revised so as to keep materials current. Each publication is punched so that it may be placed in a binder. This volume provides an introduction to the concept of individualization and suggests techniques for individualizing instruction in the foreign language classroom. The many forms of individualization are discussed, including the continuous progress system. A basic component of any kind of individualized instruction, performance objectives, are also discussed, as well as terminal course objectives, student evaluation, credit, the role of the teacher in a self-paced program, and evidence regarding the success of continuous progress foreign language programs. Options in individualizing instruction are examined, such as mini-courses or language courses for a particular purpose. Guidelines are provided for individualizing instruction. Finally, the relationship between individualization and humanization in language teaching is discussed briefly. (Author/AM)

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Foreign Languages in Virginia Schools

INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION

Preface

This publication is one of a series designed to provide information and assistance to those responsible for foreign language instruction, including teachers, administrators, supervisors, and those engaged in the preparation of teachers. The complete series serves as a curriculum guide. A list of the titles follows.

The series format offers a number of advantages. It can be used easily and revised as needed to keep the material current. Each publication is punched so that it can be placed in a ring binder. In the future titles may be added, changed, or deleted as needs suggest.

All the publications are of interest to teachers. Number 6, *Notes to the Administrator and Counselor*, is directed specifically to superintendents, supervisors, principals, and guidance counselors.

A few introductory remarks concerning the study of language are in order. A language is a skill, a tool, a humanistic discipline, an art, and a social science. It is the outstanding distinguishing factor between man and animal. People use it to communicate basic human needs and thoughts, to make money, to entertain, and to express emotions.

The rationale for language study has become more comprehensive in recent years. At the core of the rationale is the fact that knowledge of another language permits a person to live in an expanded environment. Today, more than ever before, it increases the flexibility of job seekers, especially when combined with a vocation or profession. And finally, the knowledge of another language leads to a better understanding of self and of one's own culture.

I commend this series of publications to all of those concerned with teaching and learning foreign languages with the hope that their task will be made easier and more successful.

Helen P. Warriner
Supervisor of Foreign Languages

Foreign Languages in Virginia Schools

Publications in the Series

1. Philosophy and Objectives/What is Language/
The Language Learner
2. Teaching a Language
3. Testing and Evaluation
4. Individualizing Instruction
5. Learning Aids/Instructional Personnel
6. Curricular Components/Notes to the Admini-
strator and Counselor
7. Career Education and Foreign Languages/En-
riching and Explaining the Foreign Language
Program

Table of Contents

	Page
INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION	
Introduction	1
Why Individualize?	1
Definition of Individualized Instruction	1
The Continuous Progress System	2
Performance Objectives and Individualization	3
Terminal Course Objectives	4
Student Evaluation	4
The Granting of Credit in a Continuous Progress Program	4
The Foreign Language Teacher in a Continuous Progress Program	5
Success of Continuous Progress Foreign Language Programs	6
Individualized Instruction: Other Options	7
Practical Language Courses	7
Mini-courses	7
What Every Teacher Can do to Individualize Instruction in the Classroom	8
Individualization and Humanization	9
Bibliography	10

Individualizing Instruction

INTRODUCTION

There is hardly a teacher in the classroom today who has not heard the term "individualized instruction." Some teachers and administrators view individualization as a panacea for all problems related to instruction, while others are fearful of becoming involved with anything they perceive as "new" or innovative. Both of these attitudes result from a misunderstanding of what individualized instruction really is. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the concept of individualization and to suggest techniques foreign language teachers may use to increase individualized learning in the classroom.

WHY INDIVIDUALIZE?

In recent years foreign language teachers have opened their doors to a broader spectrum of students who represent a wider range of aptitude, intelligence, maturity, and motivation than any other generation in the history of foreign language teaching in America. Many teachers have tried to accommodate this great diversity in the student population by gearing instruction to the individual student. Considerable success has been evidenced by students whose teachers are dedicated to the philosophy that all youngsters can learn another language provided the conditions for learning are favorable and they have no severe physical, mental, or emotional handicaps.

For centuries educators have known that everyone does not learn at the same rate. Yet, the conventional classroom makes little allowance for this fact. Too often brighter students are rewarded with good grades for accomplishing much less than they are capable of, while slower students who work diligently to keep up consider themselves fortunate if they receive a passing grade. Sometimes the slower ones, though highly motivated when they come into the class, tend to lose interest when they find themselves unable to keep up with the pace set by the teacher in a lockstep program; yet, if given more time, they might be able to reach the instructional goals of the course. Knowledge of the importance of the time factor in the learning process has led some teachers to try to provide for differences in rates of learning

by instituting self-pacing programs in which each student progresses at his or her own rate. This form of individualized instruction is known as the continuous progress system and will be explained in more detail.

It is equally well known today that all students do not learn in the same way. Recognition of differences in learning styles has caused greater individualization in many classrooms in which the teachers provide a variety of instructional activities to facilitate the learning task for all students.

Finally, it must be mentioned that not all students in a class necessarily share the same interests. It is no more valid to assume that all students in a fourth-year French class enjoy Molière, Zola, or Sartre than it is to assume that all teachers in a school share a common interest in Twain, Faulkner, or Hemingway. Today's students are more vocal about the content of their courses than they ever have been. That fact should be considered by teachers in course content without abandoning their own professional responsibility.

Today's foreign language teacher should realize that students differ in numerous ways and that not all of them can be taught by the same approach. The teacher should seek ways to accommodate individual differences among the students, keeping in mind the objective of providing positive learning experiences in the foreign language class for all youngsters, commensurate with their abilities, learning styles, and interests.

DEFINITION OF INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

The professional literature contains many attempts to define individualization as it applies to the teaching of foreign languages. Altman wrote in 1971:

A program in foreign languages may be said to be individualized when:

- (a) each student is allowed to progress through his curriculum materials at his own pace;
- (b) each student is tested only when he is

prepared to be tested (thus implying that not all students in a class will be tested simultaneously);

- (c) a student needs help, he works individually with his teacher, or with some other "resource person" in the classroom, in a tutorial manner; and
- (d) each student is aware of the nature of his learning task, and knows what he must demonstrate, and with what degree of accuracy he must demonstrate it, to receive credit for his work and to be able to move ahead in his materials.¹

Although Altman's definition is still widely accepted it is sometimes considered too restrictive because essentially it defines a self-paced program. Warriner has offered a somewhat broader definition:

The purpose of individualized instruction is to provide each student with optimum opportunities for success in foreign language learning by surrounding him with conditions for learning that best suit him. . . .

Individualization of instruction is very much a matter of degree. . . . For the teachers, the degree makes the difference between the unreachable and the attainable. . . .

Individualization is synonymous with personalization, localization, and humanization of instruction. . . .

Individualization of instruction is both a philosophy and a system. It is first a belief in and a respect for each and every student. Beyond that, it is a system comprised of methods, techniques, materials and facilities which provide the student with better opportunities for successful language learning. . . .²

Many dedicated foreign language teachers have always achieved a degree of personalization and individualization in their classrooms, have created exciting learning situations, and have motivated students to great achievement. In that sense, individualization of instruction is not new. If we view it as a goal which can be sought in varying degrees, every foreign language teacher who tries can take a few steps along the way. A majority of

teachers probably will never incorporate a totally self-paced program in their classrooms, nor should they be expected to do so. That stage is one of the most advanced of the continuum. Individualization, however, in one form or another should serve as a goal for every responsible teacher who is seeking better ways of making foreign language learning more successful for more students.

THE CONTINUOUS PROGRESS SYSTEM

Although continuous progress instruction has been popularly discussed in recent years, it is only one of many ways of individualizing instruction. It is a complex process which might be used effectively by only a small minority of teachers.

Briefly stated, the continuous progress system is based on the premise that all students can achieve in a foreign language, or in any other subject in the curriculum, provided they are given enough time. Students are allowed to pace themselves, taking as much time as necessary to achieve a degree of proficiency in a particular objective. Course levels may be determined by skills mastered and objectives attained instead of by the amount of time spent in class. In some programs that may mean promotion of students from one course level to another in less or more time than the conventional academic year provides.

Most continuous progress programs utilize, as a basic tool, learning activity packets, often known as LAPS or "unipacs." Each student uses the LAP as a guide while progressing through the curriculum materials at his or her own rate. The essential components of a LAP include:

- Behavioral or performance objectives stating what the students are expected to achieve in the particular unit of work;
- A list of learning activities to be performed to help the students attain the given performance objectives;
- Evaluation of the students' proficiency in mastering the objectives. Whenever a student feels that the objectives for a particular LAP have been mastered, he or she is given a test that reflects the requirements of the stated objectives. If the student fails to achieve the proficiency required for each objective, the teacher prescribes additional activities or directs the student to practice again some of the same activities. Then he or she is given the test again on the sections that reflect a lack of mastery. The test may be taken as many times as necessary, but the student must perform satisfactorily on all objectives before progressing to the next LAP.

¹ Howard B. Altman, "Toward a Definition of Individualized Foreign Language Programs," *American Foreign Language Teacher*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (February 1971), p. 13.

² Helen P. Warriner, "Individualized Instruction in the Teaching of Foreign Languages: A Broad View," *Oklahoma in the World: Guide to the Improvement of the Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages* (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1972), p. 102.

Teachers wishing to add more flexibility to each learning activity packet may add additional components such as the following:

- A statement of purpose may be included to introduce the students to the packet.
- A pretest is often provided, especially for students who have had previous experience of any kind in the foreign language. For example, a student who has lived in a country in which the target language is spoken may already have attained the desired proficiency in the oral skills but may need to work with the objectives related to the written skills. Successful performance in the oral sections of the pretest would permit the student to bypass those objectives and to begin working immediately on the objectives in which he or she is deficient.
- Self-evaluations may be included which permit students to test themselves before taking the required test for the unit. This procedure can save time for the teacher and the students since they are less likely to take the unit test before they are ready.
- Additional optional activities may be suggested for students who feel that they need extra practice in certain areas.

The degree of individualization practiced may vary from one continuous progress program to another. Some teachers allow for differences among students by permitting them some choice in their own objectives. They contend that some students may not be interested in speaking the language and that those students should be allowed to ignore the objectives related to the speaking skills and concentrate on becoming more proficient in reading. Teachers would do well to keep in mind, though, that they are, first and foremost, language teachers and that languages, including Latin, involve four communication skills and not one or two. The average junior high or high school student is not ready to predict which skills he or she will need 5 or 10 years later in life. After reaching a reasonable degree of proficiency in the four skills, the advanced student might wish to concentrate on developing certain skills more than others, but the beginning level is hardly the place for such specialization.

Teachers who recognize differences in individual learning styles may let the students choose activities that will best help them individually to attain the performance objective. For example, a student who learns better by seeing a structure in written form before practicing it orally might read it from a text or lesson prepared by the teacher before practicing it orally. It is the teacher's responsibility to help the students discover the ways in which

they learn best, for when permitted to make their own decisions students sometimes look for the easiest or most expedient way to achieve an objective rather than the one that results in their learning the material at hand.

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES AND INDIVIDUALIZATION

A basic component of some language teaching, especially continuous progress instruction, is the use of performance objectives. A performance objective is a statement of what the student will do at some point in his or her learning program. It is always stated in terms of the learner's behavior. A well-written performance objective is specific and states three conditions:

1. What the student will do;
2. Under what conditions;
3. To what level of mastery.

The student must be able to answer for himself:

1. "What will I have to do?"
2. "What will be given to me?" (cues)
3. "How will I know whether or not I did it satisfactorily?"

By having the objectives of each unit or learning activity packet clearly defined, the students can determine what they know at any given time. Consequently, they should not ask to be tested until they are reasonably certain that they have mastered the skill called for in each objective. Several examples of well-stated performance objectives are given below.

- The student will describe in German orally a classmate. At least five things must be said about the classmate being described, and no more than three errors may be made in pronunciation, vocabulary, usage, and grammar.
- Given visual cues, the student will be able to say in Spanish all of the new vocabulary words in the "Basic Conversation" on page 55 with pronunciation and intonation that could be understood by a native.
- Given 10 sentences containing object nouns the student will rewrite the sentences replacing each noun with the appropriate pronoun with 80 percent accuracy.
- After reading the short story on pages 22-26, the student will demonstrate comprehension of the plot by answering six of the eight questions on page 27 orally in French that is understandable to a native.

Much can be said for and against the use of performance objectives in the classroom. The teacher and the students should have more meaningful objectives than "finishing the book by the end of the year." It is obvious, however, that performance objectives will not necessarily bring about individualized learning. They can serve well as valuable tools in any class and are vital to a continuous progress program.

TERMINAL COURSE OBJECTIVES

A word should be said about the importance of terminal course objectives. For too long foreign language teachers have spoken in general terms of their goals which usually consisted of teaching students to understand, speak, read, and write the target language. More recently, study of related cultures has been added as a teaching goal. While such goals are commendable, they do not specifically state what the student must be able to understand, speak, read, and write. Moreover, they have been expressed traditionally in terms of teacher behavior, not in terms of what students should be able to do or how well they should do it. Efforts to bring about articulation among teachers have consisted of agreement to cover a certain number of units in the textbook. It has been assumed that, having covered those units, the students would be able to reach stated goals. Experience has confirmed that this is not true.

Whether engaged in continuous progress programs or not, the first thing teachers should do when planning courses is to list terminal objectives. These are merely statements of skills the students shall have at the end of the course that they did not have at the beginning and statements of new knowledge they should have acquired.

These objectives should be worded in specific terms. For example, instead of stating that the students will learn to speak the foreign language, the teachers specify whether or not they are to respond in French to questions about the weather, lead a 15 minute group discussion in German about the generation gap in American society, or compose and deliver an oral presentation in Spanish on the Andalusian region.

To provide better articulation throughout a school system, the entire foreign language staff should agree on terminal course objectives for each language by levels. The objectives should specify the minimal proficiencies students must attain before being recommended for the next level course in the sequence. Once agreed upon, the objectives ought to be shared with the students, the administrators, and the parents.

When writing course objectives teachers should ask themselves, "What are the essential components of this particular course?" The list of objectives in no way restricts teachers from estab-

lishing additional objectives for students with high ability or for those who are more highly motivated than others.

STUDENT EVALUATION

Ideally, in a continuous progress program, all tests are given on a one-to-one basis when the students feel that they are ready for them. If the minimum performance requirements are not met, the students practice or study the material again and report for retesting as many times as is necessary. The final objective is that they be able to demonstrate mastery of the material before they go on to the next assignment.

All tests should be based directly on stated performance objectives. One purpose of performance objectives is to let the students know what they are expected to do.

THE GRANTING OF CREDIT IN A CONTINUOUS PROGRESS PROGRAM

Questions often arise about granting credit to students who are in continuous progress programs. In such programs each student works at his or her own pace and progress is based on mastery of skills instead of the amount of time spent in a class.

One author suggests an approach that provides for the awarding of variable credits.³ The student is not allowed to fail a course, regardless of the time required to complete the work. Credit for the course is awarded when the work is completed. Thus, it is possible to move from Level I to Level II in the middle of the year. On the other hand, an extremely talented or ambitious student might be able to complete the work designated as "Level I" in less than a year. The student would receive a full unit of credit at that time and would continue into Level II before the end of the school year.

Standards for Accrediting Secondary Schools in Virginia, which were adopted by the Board of Education and became effective July 1, 1976, provide the additional flexibility needed for granting variable credit in cases where it is desirable, including within a continuous progress program.

At the discretion of local school officials an alternative method for granting unit credit may be developed. Any locality that elects to exercise this option shall:

1. Insure that the scope of each course for which credit is awarded under this pro-

³ Will Robert Teetor, "Grading and Awarding Credit on a 'Humane' and Sensible Basis: The Ithaca Experience," *Individualization of Instruction in Foreign Languages: A Practical Guide*, edited by Ronald L. Gougher (Philadelphia: The Center for Curriculum Development, Inc., 1972), p. 158.

vision is comparable to the scope of a corresponding course meeting the standard of 150 clock hours of instruction;

2. Develop a set of performance objectives for a well defined course of study which will clearly indicate that upon completion the student will have met the aims and objectives of the course as evidenced through the mastery of certain predetermined skills, knowledge, and values associated with the course.
3. Develop procedures for evaluating the progress of students in this program. Such procedures could include criterion-referenced tests or standardized tests;
4. Develop a written policy covering this program and have approval from the division superintendent and school board."⁴

Clearly Virginia now allows the students who can do the required course work or attain the necessary proficiencies in fewer or more than 150 clock hours of instruction to get a unit of credit, provided the local school division approves the alternative plan and ensures that it is equivalent in scope to a course meeting the prescribed number of hours of instruction.

Teachers who have experience with continuous progress instruction have developed alternative ways of grading while granting the unit of credit for a year's work.

- *Ability grouping within the classroom*

The teacher determines the ability levels of the students in each class and expects mastery of fewer units of work for a slower student than for one with high ability. Yet, both students would receive the same grade, provided that the quality of the work is similar. For example, for a B, a student with high ability might be required to complete 10 units, a student of average ability 8 units, and one of low ability 6 units.

- *Setting minimal expectations at a reasonable level and giving a grade of A or B to those who complete the work and lower grades to those who complete less work.*

The student who achieves the specified degree of proficiency on 10 units might receive an A; one who achieves the specified degree of proficiency on 8 units would receive B, and one who achieves the specified degree of proficiency on 6 units would receive a C. Usually a grade lower than C is not granted in a continuous progress program.

The student who completes fewer than the 6 units receives an "incomplete" until he or she has fulfilled the requirements for at least a C grade.

- *Making the variables ones of quality, not quantity.*

By this means, for example, a student who completes 8 units at 90 per cent proficiency gets the same grade as one who completes 10 units at 80 per cent.

- *Letting the student choose the grade he or she wants to work for on each unit (Contract grades).*

Again the teacher sets minimal expectations at a reasonable level but offers the student a choice of objectives he or she must achieve for a corresponding grade in each unit. The student who wants an A on Unit 4 has more objectives to achieve and more tasks to perform than one who is satisfied with a B grade, for example. This is a form of contract learning. A minimum number of LAP's still must be completed within a given amount of time, but the student must be aware of his own capabilities and his own work pace. At the end of the grading period, the unit grades are averaged to determine the student's grade. The teacher who chooses this form of grading must be careful to include the basics in all of the choices offered the students.

Individual teachers may be able to work out for themselves even better ways of fair grading within the present system. No matter what method of grading is adopted, however, the teacher should remember that the students, parents, and school administrators must understand what the system is. Only through mutual cooperation can a proper atmosphere for learning be established and maintained in a school.

THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER IN A CONTINUOUS PROGRESS PROGRAM

The teacher who is contemplating establishing a continuous progress program should not do so without considering certain factors. Only careful planning and much work will result in any degree of success. Despite the fact that students assume more responsibility for their own learning the teacher's responsibilities are greatly increased. The teacher must see to it that the students are continuously motivated to learn and that the necessary materials and equipment are available to facilitate the task.

Obviously in a continuous progress program, all students do not perform the same activities at the same time. Some may work in groups, while others work independently. Some may practice a dialogue together, while others listen to tapes, participate

⁴ Commonwealth of Virginia, *Standards for Accrediting Secondary Schools in Virginia* (Richmond, Virginia: Department of Education, 1976) p. 6.

in a group conversation led by the teacher, an aide, or an advanced student; others may visit a learning center that is equipped with appropriate reading materials in the target language. It is essential that the conventional classroom be rearranged and that learning centers be established. A more intricate system of record keeping and grading is necessary because students often are many units apart. The teacher must work closely with all students and provide motivation and support when needed.

Some teachers spend most of their classroom time testing and checking students at various stages of instruction and neglect fundamental learning activities. One solution to this problem is to devise more evaluative devices to be self-administered and corrected by the students.

It is a monumental task for one individual to organize, develop, initiate, and coordinate a successful continuous progress program, although it is being done by some dedicated, ambitious teachers. Some schools in other states have hired paraprofessionals to assist teachers in such programs. At least one program in Virginia has used a team-teaching approach. The teacher who does not have such help might wish to explore the possibilities of securing foreign language interns from nearby teacher preparation institutions. Such an arrangement serves more than one purpose, for teacher candidates need exposure to such programs to enable them to cope effectively with this approach to language learning. Good students in advanced language classes in the same high school also can provide valuable assistance by serving as teacher aides during their instructional periods. They can operate electronic equipment and other hardware, perform general housekeeping duties such as keeping materials in order and files up-to-date, and check out materials to students, thereby enabling the teacher to be involved in the instructional process most of the time. Responsible upper-level students with a good command of the language also can accept some of the teaching responsibilities if the teacher provides close supervision. Such students can serve as tutors for individuals or groups of students, lead conversation groups, and even administer some tests. Often native speakers or interested parents within the community are willing to assist in such programs.

Teachers should not initiate a formal continuous progress program without the support of the administration and the understanding of other foreign language teachers within the school system. Agreements must be reached with the teachers who receive students from a self-paced program to continue to accommodate their needs or students will become disillusioned and frustrated, lose interest, and drop out. The program also should be explained to parents at the outset, and they should

be kept informed periodically about changes made in it and about the progress of the students in relation to their potential.

Finally, the teacher in a continuous progress program must not let the minutiae of learning tasks obscure the overall goal of the course: to provide the student with the ability to communicate in the target language. Since communication is a two-way process and occurs mainly in oral and written forms, students must learn to listen, speak, read, and write in the second language. Care must be taken to see that objectives are clear and that activities leading to attainment of the goals are provided.

SUCCESS OF CONTINUOUS PROGRESS FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

Very little conclusive evidence has been presented comparing the results of continuous progress instruction with lockstep teaching in terms of the amount of language learned. One Virginia study, consisting of three classes of French I—two of which were self-paced and designated as experimental groups and the other taught by the same teacher but in a conventional, lockstep fashion—concluded that although the experimental classes completed fewer units than the control group, they acquired as much skill in listening, speaking, reading, and writing as students in the lockstep approach. Their performance was measured by national standardized achievement tests in the four skills (MLA Cooperative Tests). Students in one of the experimental classes scored significantly higher in speaking and reading than did those in the control group.⁵ This suggests that continuous progress instruction was effective in this study and that students learning at their own speed, although covering less material, mastered what they learned and retained it.

The greatest evidence of success in self-paced programs seems to be in student motivation. In the study cited above, a larger percentage of students from the experimental groups than from the control group elected to continue their study of French.⁶ Gerald Logan, of Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill, Calif., which offers a curriculum of 44 German courses daily—totally individualized—has found that “by students learning at their own rates and with materials that are relevant to each

⁵ Susan L. Crouch and Gerelle Caldwell, *Final Report on a Pilot Study in Individualizing French I at Highland Springs High School* (Highland Springs, Virginia: Henrico County Public Schools, 1973), p. 57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

student's personality, motivation is increased."⁷ Enrollment in Logan's program has increased from 35 students to 270 over a five-year period while the total school population has remained almost constant. A middle-school program in Virginia enrolling seventh- and eighth-grade students in a continuous progress French program has reported as high as 80 percent of its 400 sixth-graders asked to enroll in the course.⁸

While much remains to be done to assess the progress that is being made, indications are favorable that well-planned continuous progress foreign language programs can be successful.

INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION: OTHER OPTIONS

Although much consideration has been given in this chapter to the continuous progress system as one form of individualized learning, it is not the only approach worthy of consideration by foreign language teachers. The importance of recognizing individual student interests in planning course content was emphasized early in the chapter. This should be done at all levels of instruction, even in the conventional sequential programs. Many teachers are trying assiduously to accommodate instruction to various student interests in the foreign language curriculum. Two alternatives to conventional courses, the so-called "practical language courses" and mini-courses, will be explained briefly in the following paragraphs.

Practical Language Courses

Foreign language teachers must face the fact that not all students share their enthusiasm for learning a foreign language. Neither are all students willing to give up one period per day for three, four, or five years to become fluent in another language. The nationwide attrition rate in the four-year foreign language sequence ranges from 85 to 90 percent. Many students never enroll in a beginning foreign language class because of its image as an academic subject. Yet we know that young people are travelling abroad more than ever before. Gladys Lipton proposes that the profession capitalize on this interest by providing the kinds of "practical" language courses that students want to meet their needs. As Lipton points out, the

commercial language schools such as Berlitz have thrived on providing such courses for persons who never studied languages during their years of formal schooling.⁹

In one-year courses with such titles as "A Trip to France," "A Tour of Spain," or "German for Travelers," students learn practical dialogues about checking into hotels, ordering meals, passing through customs, buying transportation tickets, purchasing souvenirs, and asking directions. They also learn about geography through the use of maps and films. They learn to read transit timetables, road signs, and menus and become familiar with foreign currency. Students might even "specialize" in cities or regions of particular interest.

Such courses probably will attract some students who would not otherwise enroll in "conventional" foreign language courses. The objectives should be clearly explained. Students should understand that the courses are offered in addition to the sequential program and that, because of the different objectives, it would be difficult to make the transition to the conventional Level II class upon successful completion of the specialized course.

Mini-courses

Mini-courses represent a way of arranging content according to students' interests. Such courses are individualized to the extent that students learn and practice the foreign language through topics and materials that they have chosen from among many options, according to their personal interests. As the name implies a mini-course is a segment of a larger course. It is generally from three to nine weeks long, and credit usually is given in proportion to the amount of time spent in the course.

The mini-course is found most often in advanced-level language classes, perhaps during the third year or above. If the objectives include practice and further development of language skills, it is reasonable to assume that the courses should not be offered before the students have attained a working command of the language. Course content may be presented in packet form to give students more options during a given time period, or they may be taught conventionally with teachers working with groups of students during specific periods of time.

Organization of worthwhile mini-courses requires much planning. Ample time should be allowed for teachers to consult students and administrators, develop materials, and gather the necessary resources.

⁷ Donna E. Sutton, "Problems of Individualized Instruction—How Some Successful Programs Deal With Them," *Individualization of Instruction in Foreign Languages: A Practical Guide*, edited by Ronald L. Gough (Philadelphia: The Center for Curriculum Development, Inc., 1972), p. 103.

⁸ James H. Earl, "French Classes Set Pace for Individualization," *Accent on ACTFL*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April, 1973), p. 25.

⁹ Gladys Lipton, "Curricula for New Goals," *ACTFL Review of Foreign Language Education*, Vol. IV, edited by Dale L. Lange and Charles L. James (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1972), p. 199.

If the content of mini-courses is to be centered around students' interests, logically the first step is to determine those interests. That may be accomplished by having students in intermediate and advanced classes respond to written questionnaires or by discussing the tentative plans with them in class. The students are asked to name the areas of study related to the language and culture that interest them most. The teachers then analyze those carefully, combining topics that appear to be similar, adding topics that might be interesting and appropriate, and eliminating those that they are not prepared to teach. From the list, the students are asked to choose the topics that appeal to them most and to rank them in order from one to five. The result of the ranking might become the basis for the mini-course offerings during the following academic year.

In large high schools with several teachers of the same language, persons with special interests or strengths may choose to be in charge of certain mini-courses. In some cases, a team-teaching approach may be utilized. Today's foreign language teacher must be willing to explore unfamiliar topics with the students. Teachers often find that learning with the students can be a most rewarding experience.

Once the course topics have been decided, they should be announced and course descriptions presented to the students. Students should be reminded of the new offerings until the time of pre-registration when they are asked to make a commitment. Individual teachers must then accept their share of responsibility in setting up the courses. Objectives should be determined, learning activities planned, and resources compiled. Realia such as foreign periodicals, films, recipes, records, tapes, reference books, texts, technical readings, and travel information may have to be secured which may require more time than anticipated. Individuals outside the foreign language department may be helpful in certain courses and arrangements should be made with them well in advance. For example, in a mini-course on French culinary arts, the use of the facilities and assistance of the teachers in the home economics department probably would be necessary.

The following is a partial listing of mini-courses that have been developed and have been or are being taught in French, Spanish and German classes at one high school in New York State. All are advanced-level courses.

FRENCH

Advanced Conversation
French for Travelers
Creative Writing
Current Events in France
French Movies and Theater

Advanced Reading
Everyday Life in France
French Folklore and Mythology
Human Dynamics in French
French Drama Workshop

GERMAN

German for Travelers
Advanced Conversation and Comprehension
Scientific German (reading)
The Culinary Arts of the German-Speaking Countries
German Ecology
Fun and Games in German
German Art, Architecture, and Music
U. S. Relations with Germany:
Economics and Politics
Current German Politics

SPANISH

Spanish for Travelers
Commercial Spanish
Everyday Life in Latin America
The Great Spanish Philosophers
The Faces of Spain: Geography and People
Modern Spanish Literature
The Indians of Latin America
Current Events in the Spanish-Speaking World.¹⁰

Students should be involved in the constant evaluation of the mini-course. Such evaluation should not wait until the course has been completed, but should begin early, preferably after the first two weeks. If the students' expectations are not being met, or if the teacher is not satisfied with their progress and involvement, steps should be taken immediately to determine what the problems are and to work cooperatively with the students to correct them.

WHAT EVERY TEACHER CAN DO TO INDIVIDUALIZE INSTRUCTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Gerald Logan, who has developed and implemented one of the best known and most highly structured continuous-progress programs in the nation, has pointed out that teachers also are individuals and that their teaching styles and personalities deserve respect just as the individual differences among students do.¹¹ No teacher should

¹⁰ Warren C. Born, editor, *Toward Student-Centered Foreign Language Programs*, Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1974, Reports of the Working Committees (Montpelier, Vermont: Capital City Press), pp. 81-82.

¹¹ Gerald E. Logan, "Individualized FL Education: Is It Just Another Fad?" *Accent on ACTFL*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (February, 1973), p. 8.

be coerced into implementing a formal individualized program; however, every teacher has a professional responsibility to take steps along the continuum toward greater individualized learning. All teachers in Virginia are required by the Standards of Quality and Objectives for Public Schools to assume responsibility for humanizing instruction and providing for individual differences among students. Those duties are listed in the classroom planning and management objectives of the Standards.¹²

Moreover, the principles and techniques involved in the more formal approaches to individualization have implications for every foreign language teacher. Among the more notable are the following:

- Course content should be based on both long-term and short-term realistic, measurable objectives, to which both the teacher and the student are committed. Covering a certain number of pages or chapters in a textbook within a given amount of time is not a good objective.
- Furniture can be arranged in a variety of patterns to accommodate instruction.
- Teaching strategies must vary in accordance with the objectives. For example, large group instruction is suitable for the teacher to present facts or give explanations to students, but oral skills are sometimes developed more efficiently when students practice in small groups. There is more opportunity for each student to speak and the setting is more realistic.
- The teacher is not the sole individual from whom the students may learn. The teacher will make use of peer teaching whenever feasible and will profit from the aid of student assistants from advanced classes.
- Students should be tested only on what they are taught. It is unfair to trick students by putting items on tests which have received little emphasis in class. The use of criterion-referenced tests is recommended.

It is important that each teacher constantly re-evaluate his or her own teaching practices. Questions that should be considered might include:

- What percentage of my students are failing or are achieving below their capabilities? What can I do about them?
- How much do I know about each student, his or her academic strengths and weaknesses,

previous experiences, cultural background, and chief interests outside of my class?

- Are my expectations realistic for all the students in my classes?
- How can I use the resources available to me to help each student achieve in accordance with his or her own abilities?
- What additional resources do I need to provide even greater opportunities for all students?
- Do I evaluate each student fairly and individually?
- Is each student in my classes assured of my interest in him or her?
- Do I personalize the content of my courses, or do my students look upon the target language as something found only in the textbook? Do I adapt dialogue lines and conversations to a localized situation?
- Would I enjoy being a student in my classes?
- Am I afraid of experimenting cautiously with new ideas? Do I label everything innovative as dangerous?

A careful and honest appraisal by each teacher of his or her attitudes and teaching practices and a real desire to strengthen existing weaknesses is the first step toward bringing about greater individualization of instruction in the classroom.

INDIVIDUALIZATION AND HUMANIZATION

Throughout this chapter emphasis has not been on any particular system or form of individualization but rather on what the teacher can do to provide greater opportunities for a larger number of students to achieve success in foreign language classes. A deliberate effort has been made to point out that the teacher's role is still the single most important factor in the success or failure of an individualized program.

Theoretically, individualization should lead to greater humanization of instruction. It is easy, however, to become so involved in the technical aspects of systems such as the continuous progress approach, that the teacher-student relationship is eroded rather than enhanced. Howard Altman expresses concern about this danger in his book, *Individualizing the Foreign Language Classroom: Perspectives for Teachers*.¹³

The philosophy of individualized instruction is directed toward helping each student make the most of his or her ability and circumstances for learning. By consistently striving to make the cur-

¹² Commonwealth of Virginia, *Standards of Quality and Objectives for Public Schools in Virginia 1972-74* (Richmond, Virginia: Department of Education, 1972), p. i.

¹³ Howard B. Altman, ed., *Individualizing the Foreign Language Classroom: Perspectives for Teachers* (Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1972), p. vi.

riculum; more personal and more humane, every foreign language teacher in Virginia will find that individualized instruction is an attainable goal.

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